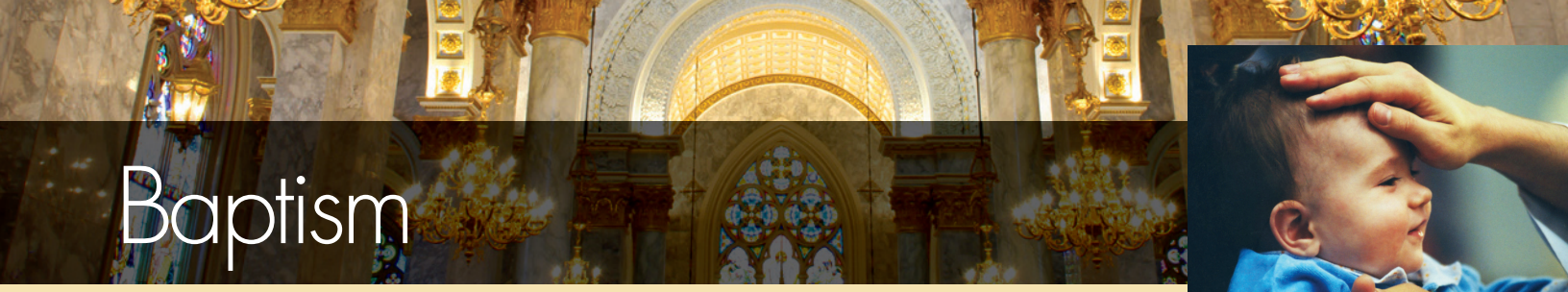
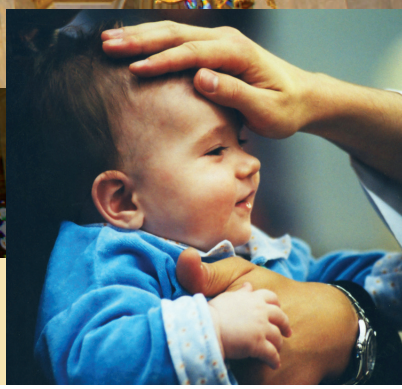


Baptism



Incorporated into Christ's Body, Sent on Christ's Mission

The sacraments celebrated by the Church are signs of grace that make a deeper reality present to us. One reality we encounter through the sacraments is Christ's presence in the Church community, his Body. This recognition of Christ's presence in the community should lead to a stronger awareness of being sent on mission to engage in love-inspired action in the world.

As Pope Benedict XVI notes in *Deus Caritas Est* (*God Is Love*), the celebration of the sacraments and the ministry of love are "inseparable." Love in action, he says, is "an indispensable expression" of the Church's being (no. 25).

This guide focuses on the Sacrament of Baptism, the rite of initiation into the Christian community. As you read, consider the meaning of your own Baptism, your membership in the community, and the call of every Christian, by "virtue of their baptism," to "become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19)" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [*The Joy of the Gospel*], no. 120).

Baptism makes us "members of one another."

Since the time of early Christianity, Baptism has been the rite of initiation into the Christian community of the Church. In Baptism, the "one Spirit" makes us members of the Body of Christ and of "one another" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], no. 1267). St. John Paul II describes the result of Baptism as a "mystical unity" between Christ and his disciples, and the disciples with one another, like "branches of a single vine." This reflects the mystical communion of the Holy Trinity (*Christifideles Laici* [*The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*], no. 12).

Baptism reveals the equality and dignity of each member of the community.

In the one Body of Christ, all the members share "a common dignity" so that "no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex" exists, for all are one in Christ (*Lumen Gentium* [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*], no. 32).

Baptism requires us to reject sin and re-assess our values, decisions, and lifestyles.

During the Rite of Baptism, we reject sin, renouncing those beliefs, values, and choices that are opposed to Christ. We also reject sinful attitudes that degrade the dignity of others (e.g., racism, sexism, etc.) and practices that prevent other members of our human family from living in dignity (e.g., abortion, policies that hurt the poor, etc.). Baptism calls us to reject death and embrace life and dignity for all.

In Baptism, we profess our commitment to the Church's beliefs, values, and vision.

At Baptism, we embrace a unique vision and set of values: those of the community of the Church, whose values prioritize love for God, self, others, and all of creation. The rest of the community also joins in the profession of faith, illustrating that the community is linked across generations, space, and time.

Baptism invites us to a vocation of holiness and the practice of charity.

Pope Francis writes, "Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness" (*Gaudete et Exsultate* [*Rejoice and be Glad*], no. 15) and the ability to love "with the Lord's unconditional love" (no. 18). In Baptism, we receive a "vocation to holiness," which is "intimately connected" to our membership in the "Communion of Saints," which strives to make present the "Kingdom of God in history." Participation in the Communion of Saints requires a commitment to communion with Christ and "a life of charity" in "this world and in the next" (*Christifideles Laici*, nos. 17, 19).

Baptism incorporates us into the life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the world.

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (*Compendium*) reminds us, "By Baptism, the laity are incorporated into Christ and are made participants in his life and mission" (no. 541). The triple immersion in the baptismal water signifies the death of sin and entry into the newness of life through Christ's Death and Resurrection. The oil signifies anointing by the Holy Spirit and receiving of the Holy Spirit's gifts. The Holy Spirit helps us to imitate Jesus' self-sacrificial love and allows us to share in the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.

Baptism leads us to imitate Christ's example.

The baptized are called to imitate Jesus' example and strive in thought, word, and action to live his love. This means working to heal the wounds of sin, living the Beatitudes, practicing the twofold commandment of love of God and neighbor, and imitating the lives of the saints (CCC, nos. 1694-97). Having been anointed by the Spirit, "Christians can repeat in an individual way the words of Jesus: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' . . . (Lk 4:18-19)" (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 13).

Baptism makes us disciples to the world.

Incorporation into Christ and into the community of the People of God means agreeing to take part in, and to self-identify with, its mission to become disciples in the world (CCC, no. 1276, and *Compendium*, no. 541). St. John Paul II writes, "Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism," every baptized person "shares a responsibility for the Church's mission" (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 15). The baptized must work as disciples of Christ by caring for the sick, the oppressed, the debilitated, and the sinners. We are called to carry out this work not only in our local communities, but also in the global community of which we are also members. In this way, we can extend to all the love, compassion, and mercy of God that we ourselves have come to know.

Baptism calls us to live in the world, seeking the Kingdom in our daily lives.

During the blessing of the baptismal waters at the Easter Vigil, we recall God's action within history. We hear, for example, about the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Christians believe that "Baptism does not take [the baptized] from the world at all." Instead, the world becomes the "place" and "means" for the lay faithful to "fulfill their Christian vocation" (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 15). We give expression to our baptismal reality "in our daily lives" in "the field" of the world (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* [*Sacrament of Charity*], no. 79). The baptized work within the spheres of "work, culture, science and research; the exercise of social, economic and political responsibilities" to order them to the Kingdom (*Compendium*, no. 543).

The baptized are called to contribute to the sanctification of the world. Being "present and active in the world" is a "theological and ecclesiological reality" (*Compendium*, no. 543). This reality is what leads us to work to protect the life and dignity of all people and to care for God's creation here on earth. "The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit," Pope Benedict XVI, notes. Instead, we see it as "God's creation." Our Baptism helps us see a "profound relationship" between our work here on earth and our future with Christ (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 92).

The baptized are to live as lights in the darkness.

After being baptized, we acknowledge or receive a white garment to signify that we have risen with Christ. We receive a lighted candle, which symbolizes that we are a new creation, enlightened by Christ. We are now called to carry that light into the dark world to extend the light to others (CCC, no. 1243). The gifts given at Baptism, Pope Benedict XVI writes, are for "the building up of Christ's Body (1 Cor 12) and for ever greater witness to the Gospel in the world" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 17).

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QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

What is the connection between your Baptism and work to protect the life and dignity of every person?